BLM LIBRARY
88081585

In Green River City -

with the Powell Expeditions

~ Adventures in the Past ~

Bureau of Land Management
Rock Springs District Office
P.O. Box 1869
Rock Springs, Wyoming 82902-1869

F
594
.I54
1991

U.S. Bureau of Land
IN GREEN RIVER
CITY WITH THE
POWELL
EXPEDITIONS,

BLM Library
Denver Federal Center
Bldg. 85, OC-521
P.O. Box 25047
Denver, CO 80225

#1553678707
ID:88081585
F
594
.I54
1991

In Green River City with the Powell Expeditions

John Wesley Powell...

The name alone invokes thoughts of adventure, of bravery, of exploration, of men pitted against nature. Powell's expeditions of 1869 and 1871-72 on the Green and Colorado Rivers, particularly through the Grand Canyon, have sparked the imaginations of readers and river runners for over a hundred years. Indeed, Powell's own book, *Explorations of the Colorado River of the West and its Tributaries*, which was first published in 1875 is still a popular seller today.

Controversy surrounds the events that led three of the party to leave the group in the middle of the Grand Canyon and die shortly thereafter, filled full of arrows on the North Rim. There are also questions about why some events which occurred during the second expedition of 1871 are attributed to the '69 trip and why none of the men who participated in 1871 are credited for their contributions, especially since most of the truly scientific work was accomplished on the second journey.

As happens with so many people and events of the past, Major Powell attained an exalted status which has not been matched in river lore to this day, 120 years later. But with all the fame Powell attained from his journeys, elements of the story are clouded in doubt and still disputed among river buffs and historians.

Some of the answers to the questions can be found in the diaries, letters, and writings of the other 19 men who accompanied the Major in his explorations. Some of the men wrote scientifically, some wrote in an adventure style of the times, and some recorded their feelings and frustrations. Several of them wrote in detail about their experiences in Green River

City and southwest Wyoming.

The men of both the '69 and '71 trips didn't just arrive in Green River and then take off down the river. They spent several days camped out by the river - waiting for the boats and other expedition members to arrive. And while they waited they got to know the citizens of the town fairly well.

"and in the meantime tried to drink all the whiskey there was in town. The result was a failure, as Jake Field persisted in making it faster than we could drink it." Jack Sumner, 1869

It's interesting to note that the men of the 1869 trip differed as a group from the men of the 1871 expedition. The '69 group consisted of more rough-and-tumble frontiersmen, almost all were Civil War veterans. The '71 crowd was more educated and had more scientists and professionals along. The incidents and impressions they recorded about their stay in Green River seems to support this.

Jack Sumner recorded his 1869 arrival and stay in Green River: *"...We reached Fort Badger (Bridger), and then on to Green River Station on the Union Pacific railroad, where we camped and awaited orders and in the meantime tried to drink all the whiskey there was in town. The result was a failure, as Jake Field persisted in making it faster than we could drink it."*

The men of the 1871 expedition also became acquainted with the Field's family and store. They recorded painting a sign for the store, eating meals with them, singing in the evening with the family, taking afternoon tea, and going for a boat ride with several of the local ladies.

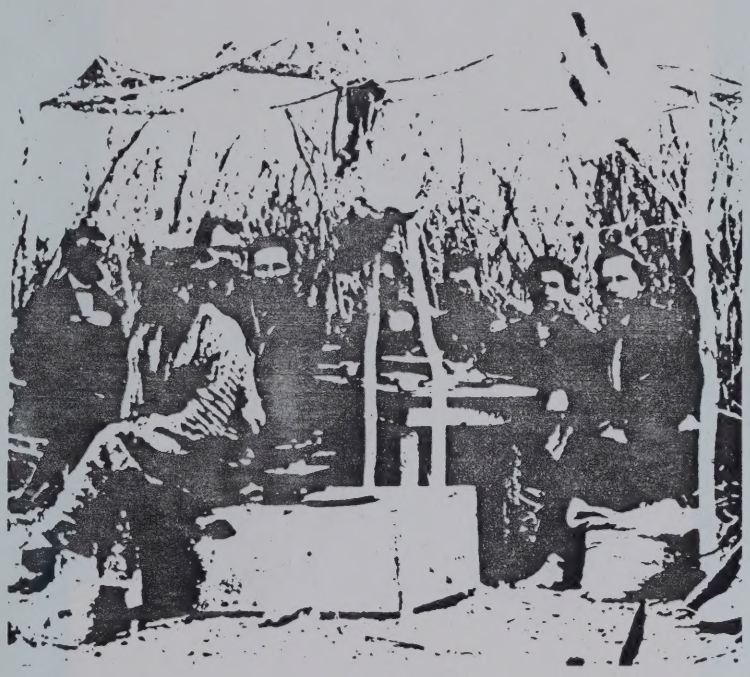
One of the best '69 stories about events in Green River was written by William Rhodes Hawkins and published in Stanton's book, *Colorado River Controversies.*

Originally from Missouri, Hawkins had had trouble with the law in the East and some of his companions thought he was on the run as he seemed nervous whenever lawmen were around or mentioned. Whatever he was or was not, he tells a good story:

"The Major brought from the East a young man whom some friends of the Major's sent out West to see the sights and join our expedition down the unknown regions of the Great Colorado of the West. We boys noticed that this young man did not seem to like our bill of fare. I was the cook and the boys, particularly Sumner, bragged on my cooking and said I could make the best coffee in the world and a pie that would last a man a week. But it did not exactly suit the young tenderfoot. The third day, Captain Powell, who had just bought himself a new pair of boots, wanted to wash his socks. I gave him a small camp kettle and he put the socks to soak.

At noon I had the coffee in a large camp kettle, and the small one the Captain's socks were in was hid from the boys behind the large one. Then we all sat down on the ground to eat our dinner. I had done my level best that day to please our newcomer. I had dished up the coffee and they were all drinking it and feeling fine. Sumner said there was something might peculiar about the coffee, and asked me what was the matter with it. I took my bowie knife and stuck it in one of the Captain's

socks and held it up over the kettle just back of the coffee. With the reddish brown water running off, it looked just as though I had taken it out of the coffee kettle. I yelled, "Who in hell put his socks in the coffee?" All said they had not, except the young man who did not answer. When I asked him if he had, he said very politely that he had not, but he was getting up and leaving at the time. That was the last we ever saw of him. When the Major got his mail at the Virgin, he heard that the young man had gone home and said our grub did not suit him, and that he thought the Major had a hard crowd with him."

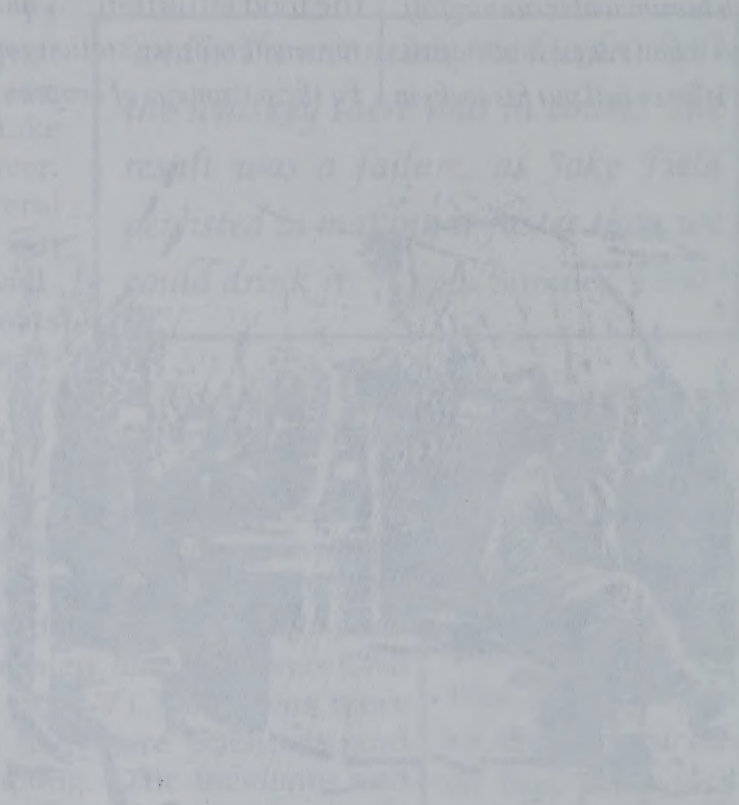


In his book, *The Romance of the Colorado River*, Frederick Dellenbaugh commented on the town of Green River in 1871, *"...This Place, when the railway was building, had been for a considerable time the terminus and a town of respectable proportions had grown up, but with the completion of the road through this region, the terminus moved on, and now all that was to be seen of those golden days was a group of adobe walls, roofless and forlorn. The present "City" consisted of about thirteen houses, and some of these were of such complex construction that one hesitates whether to describe them as houses with canvas roofs, or tents with board sides.*

Dellenbaugh went on to also describe the food situation, *"... and last but not least, at the small railway station eating-house, honoured by the patronage of emigrant-trains, his highness Ah Chug, the cook, whose dried-apple pies, at twenty-five cents apiece, I have never ceased to enjoy, for they were the ladder by which I was able to descend from a home table to the camp fare of bacon and beans. I then despised these ruder viands, but now I desire to pay my tribute to them by saving that as a basis for campaigning they are the very best."*

On both launch days in May in 1869 and 1871, the town of Green River turned out to either warn the adventurers of certain death and peril; or to wish them luck on their journey.

Many of the diaries and letters of the men on both expeditions can be found in the 1939, 1947, 1948, 1949, and 1969 Utah Historical Quarterlies.



BLM-WY-AE-91-006-4332

BLM Library
Denver Federal Center
Bldg. 85, OC-521
P.O. Box 25047
Denver, CO 80225